

[By Geoff Koss](#)

A tea party conservative and Northeastern liberal teamed up last week to give energy efficiency efforts a symbolic push in the House by creating a new bipartisan caucus focused on increasing the federal government's use of private contractors that specialize in reduced energy use at public buildings.

Launched by Cory Gardner, R-Colo., and Peter Welch, D-Vt., the 10-member caucus aims to expand the use of energy-saving performance contracts, under which federal agencies pay private firms to make energy efficiency upgrades at their facilities.

Authorized by Congress in 1992, the contracts allow the private firms a share of the energy savings that result from efficiency measures they install at their own initial cost, thereby saving the federal government the upfront capital expenditures.

"There is nearly 3 billion square feet of building space that is owned and operated by the federal government, and by making government buildings more energy efficient we can save taxpayer dollars and give a boost to the construction and energy sectors of our economy," Welch and Gardner said in a joint statement last week.

In December 2011, President Barack Obama directed federal agencies to enter into at least \$2 billion worth of the contracts over a two-year period, an amount that non-government entities pledged to match on their own energy efficiency upgrades.

The U.S. Chamber of Commerce and the American Federation of Teachers hailed the announcement at the time, but Gardner and Welch said the federal government's efforts so far have been too slow.